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ABSTRACT

Noting that a small portion of older emergent readers are usually found in all primary classes, this pamphlet discusses how teachers can help students with reading difficulties see how to fit together the snippets of literacy-related information they may have already acquired. After a brief introduction, the pamphlet suggests that children learn to read by using reading for real purposes and by focusing on meaning, and that this can be accomplished most effectively by exposing the children to "real" books rather than purpose-written "scheme materials." The remaining sections of the pamphlet discuss aspects of the Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DRTA), including: the rationale for the activity; a summary of the DRTA procedure; a discussion of each step in the procedure using Anthony Browne's book "Look What I've Got!"; and a discussion of several sub-strategies (involving reading and writing) that may be used within and after the DRTA. The pamphlet concludes with a list of 11 books by Anthony Browne for further reading. (RS)

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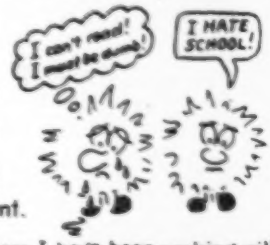
PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHING ASSOCIATION

A small proportion of older emergent readers, or to use what is perhaps a more appropriate name, inexperienced readers, are usually found in all primary classes. Sometimes they have that ambiguous label *specific learning difficulty* attached to them. Often they've spent much of their time in school involved in remedial programs, but their reading has shown little improvement.



For the past fifteen years I have been working with such children. Close observation reveals that most of them are unable to function in an *integrated way*. Quite often they have acquired a great many snippets of literacy-related information but are unable to see how these pieces fit together to make reading and writing possible. Most do not know why they are learning to read and write. They haven't realised that literacy can serve many purposes in their lives or that it has any relevance to them personally. Consequently they often lack the motivation to keep trying.

'MEANING' – the key to successful language learning

Meaning forms the basis of all learning (especially language learning), and language is the vehicle for expressing and communicating that meaning. Speaking, listening, reading and writing are the four modes of language and as such are very closely inter-related. Each mode supports the others, and so they are best learned together in a language block rather than taught in discrete lessons.

We learn speech by using it and needing to use it for *real purposes*, and in using it we focus on *meaning*. Literacy learning follows the same pattern (though for most children it will not happen as naturally as speech learning). Hence children learn to read by using reading for real purposes and by focusing on meaning. However, to get at meaning, they need to work with *whole* texts before moving on to knowledge of detail within those texts. This opens the way for integrated functioning to occur and gives them a clear view of how the bits fit together to make reading and writing possible.

For these reasons I choose to use 'real books' rather than purpose-written 'scheme' materials. I find stories particularly valuable because:

- readers are more likely to persevere so as to enjoy each story and find out what happens
- stories are the kind of reading they will be able to pursue pleasurably at home
- real books bear no tell-tale number or colour code signifying 'failure'.

In order to learn to read, the child needs to know that:

- meaning is central to every act of reading
- reading can serve many purposes
- all reading must make sense, sound right and fit the letters on the page (*integrated functioning*).

In order to succeed, children experiencing difficulties need:

- meaningful, worthwhile experiences with real texts
- to experience success
- reading to be made as easy as possible for them
- extended time to read meaningful texts
- to become risk-takers and know that it's all right to make mistakes
- to proceed from whole meaningful texts to knowledge of detail (e.g. letter/sound relationships or the meaning of particular words).

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DIRECTED READING and THINKING ACTIVITY

DRTA (developed by Stauffer, 1970)

Rationale

All children need to be given frequent opportunities to see how fragments of acquired knowledge fit into the whole context of reading and writing. One way to demonstrate this process is by using a directed reading and thinking activity (DRTA), working with whole texts but incorporating knowledge of detail.

The DRTA technique taps directly into comprehension by encouraging children to use prediction skills to become involved with the text. Prediction skills draw upon personal experiences within the child's memory — experiences which have already provided a basis on which the child makes sense of daily life. In effect, the DRTA technique promotes the use of semantic knowledge (knowing if something makes sense) to assist in the reading process.

N.B. DRTA IS ONLY SUITABLE FOR USE WITH NARRATIVE TEXTS.

As each segment of a story is completed during a DRTA session, children have access to progressively more information on which to speculate on coming events in the story. With the accumulated information it is often possible to predict the ending of a story quite precisely. And because the story content is discussed and compared with personal predictions, comprehension is enriched.

DRTA can be implemented equally well with inexperienced or competent readers, whole classes, groups or individual children. It is particularly effective with those inexperienced readers, who because of an over-reliance on 'sounding out', have learned to ignore the importance of making sense of a text and the role of meaning in decoding unfamiliar words.

Many supporting strategies can be incorporated within the context of the DRTA technique, depending on whether the text is being shared or read independently, and on the literacy competence of the children involved.

Teachers should note that DRTA is only one of many strategies to be used within a reading program. Like any other strategy, it should not be over-used to the extent of imperilling enjoyment and meaningful reading. And we certainly don't want children to develop the notion that 'reading is a DRTA'.

This type of misconception can occur when any one strategy is used too often.

SUMMARY of DRTA PROCEDURE

Preparation

Divide the narrative into four sections. End each section with a passage that will promote prediction of the subsequent section.

Lesson sequence

1 Children predict the story on the basis of
- the title only, and then
- the title and cover picture.

Record and read the predictions.

2 Read the first section of the text. (This may take the form of independent reading or shared reading, as appropriate.)

3 Compare what has been read with the recorded predictions. Rethink the predictions on the basis of accumulated story knowledge. Predict the next section.

4 Repeat steps 2 and 3 for subsequent sections.

In practice ...

More often than not teachers use a modified version of the DRTA technique. For example, the choice and number of stopping points will vary according to the structure of selected texts and the reading proficiency of the participants. Thus, while it may be appropriate to divide the narrative into four sections with effective readers, it may well be best to divide simple picture books into only two sections for inexperienced and beginning readers.

Where do we go from here?

Many teachers will already be familiar with the DRTA technique. What I am offering is a closer look so that we can exploit it better and use every teaching opportunity to full advantage.

Below I suggest a wide range of sub-strategies that may be used within the major strategy – DRTA. *Teachers should select only a few of these when dealing with any one book, according to the perceived needs of the children involved.* The range included here has been accumulated after using the same book with a number of different groups of children.

DRTA

using Anthony Browne's *Look What I've Got!*
(Julia MacRae, 1980)

The book contains:
- 112 different words, of which
- 52% have three letters or less, and
- a further 20% have four letters, and there are
- multiple repetitions of high frequency words...

you the said I what was
got had I've look but bet.

The book was written to interest young readers, but no vocabulary constraints were used.

3

I chose this book because:
- it's a supportive picture book suitable for inexperienced older readers
- the author is popular with these children
- it was written to provide enjoyment
- there are many 'secrets', especially in the illustrations, for readers to discover
- I really like it!

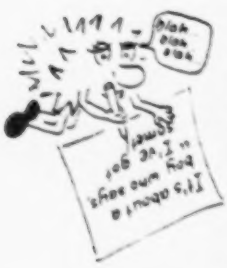
LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK...

1 PREDICTIONS from the COVER

Display the title only. Elicit what the title is. Count the words in the title (concepts of print).
Note the use of upper case letters and the purpose for the apostrophe in 'I've'.
Ask, '*What kind of book do you think this will be? Why?*'
Then, on the basis of the title only, ask, '*What do you think this story might be about?*'

Accept all responses *without criticism*. If any seem incongruous, discuss them in the light of the information available in the title, without putting down either the child or the suggestion. If the response can be justified, it should be retained for recording.

Sub-strategy: MODELLING the WRITING PROCESS



When modelling the writing process, I take every opportunity to explain conventions of print and to engage children actively in helping with the writing. So when I scribe children's predictions, I talk about the process almost *non-stop*.

Since I usually work with small groups of children, I often sit on the floor with a large sheet of paper and a thick, old-style infant's pencil and have the children sitting in a semi-circle, so that each can see clearly what's happening. This way I can also keep a close eye on who is actually attending to the task at hand.

For larger groups I would suggest that a white-board, chalkboard or large piece of butcher's paper would suffice. The important factor is that each child should have a clear view of what's happening while the teacher offers verbal explanations and invites participation.

I pay particular attention to the development of *phonemic awareness* and *graphophonic knowledge* and their role in the writing process. I emphasise 'sound to symbol' relationships so that children listen to words and pay close attention to the sequence of sounds heard. They may then suggest what letters should be used to represent those sounds.

The actual scribing and explanation process follows this pattern:

CHILD: *It's about a boy who says 'I've got something that you haven't got!'*
TEACHER: *Let's see if we can write all that down so we can remember it later.*
How will I start the sentence?
CHILD: *With an upper case letter.*
TEACHER: *Why?*
CHILD: *Because it's at the start of a sentence.*
TEACHER: *Yes... 'It'... I can hear i-t. (Say the word slowly to 'stretch it' so that the sounds can be heard clearly.)*
Now, 'it's' is short for 'it is', so I'll need to write something before the 's'. Any suggestions?
CHILD: *A comma.*
TEACHER: *Well it looks like a comma, but it's written higher to become part of the word and it's called an apostrophe. This time the apostrophe is used to shorten 'it is' into 'it's'.*
Got... Stretch 'got.'
CHILD: *G-o-t.*
TEACHER: *How many sounds can you hear in 'got'?*
CHILD: *Three.*
TEACHER: *What did you hear first?... Next?... On the end? Would someone like to write this word for me?*

This type of chatter continues, with attention being paid to a number of teaching points. Not *all* children will attend to *all* these points. However, the process is repeated often in different contexts in different lessons, and when the child is ready, the relevant detail will be assimilated.

It's handy during this stage to have writing aids available. These might include an alphabet chart with pictures, a set of magnetic letters on a baking tray, word banks and books (so that reference can be made to 'how it's done in books').

Sub-strategy: LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE READING

The resulting scribed text is then read by the group. Text which is scribed in such a way from the children's own language and then read by those same children constitutes a form of language experience writing and reading.

Because it is entirely predictable, language experience text is very easy to read. It enables children to behave immediately as effective readers. Success is almost assured!

The above procedure is repeated after the cover picture has been displayed and discussed.

Sub-strategy: TEXT RE-READINGS

The initial scribed predictions are now re-read for another purpose – to see whether or not they are still applicable. They are either confirmed, modified on the basis of additional information contained in the picture, or rejected.

The more often a legitimate reason for re-reading can be offered, the better. Children do need repeated re-readings of familiar texts to begin to recognise individual words instantly. After all, remember that to be able to use the cueing systems interactively and read independently, they need to be able to read nine out of every ten words with ease.

2 READING of the NARRATIVE TEXT

The first section of *Look what I've Got!* (as selected by the teacher) is read by the group. It may either be read:

- independently by each participant if it has been matched to ability level, or
- as a shared reading with enlarged text.

3 COMPARISON

In order to gauge comprehension, children are asked to retell the story so far. They then discuss the story component, comparing what has actually happened with the recorded predictions. Again, unsuitable predictions are rejected and further predictions are scribed on the basis of the accumulated story line.

4 REPEAT the PROCESS

Each pre-selected section of the story is treated in a similar manner.

Quite often, when predicting the final episode, children have accumulated enough information about the story to be able to predict the ending quite closely.

Sub-strategy: CO-OPERATIVE CLOZE

Normally co-operative cloze is conducted when texts are re-read. However, I often incorporate it judiciously at some stage during the initial text reading.

I stick 'Post it' note papers (using three layers because you can see through one or two) over selected words. Deciding which words to cover depends on which of the cues I am focusing on and my knowledge of the specific needs of the children.

I ask children to say 'blank' for the hidden word and to complete their reading of the sentence. They are then invited to suggest options for the hidden word.

TRY ALL SUGGESTIONS IN CONTEXT

As a group, we reject unsuitable responses. In this case we are left with three responses that would fit. To narrow the choices further, I add graphophonic information, peeling back the covering to reveal 's'.
I ask: *'If the word is "seem", what letter might you expect to see next?'* We check. I reveal the whole word: *'Does this word look like it could be "seem"? How can you tell?'*

With one group I wanted to focus on 'sh'. To reinforce phonemic awareness and graphophonic knowledge whilst using co-operative cloze, I also made use of magnetic letters on a baking tray.

Sentences selected: *'I bet you ____ you had one.'* (wish)
Jeremy passed a ____. (shop)
(clue contained in the picture)
These two examples provided opportunity to practise 'sh' in both the initial and final positions.

This is the sort of procedure I might use with the first sentence.
Ascertain *wish* as the missing word. Ask children to stretch it (i.e. say it slowly) and then use magnetic letters to make the word.
Check attempts against the word as it appears in the book.

Once a word has been dealt with in context, then in subsequent lessons we might play around with it out of context, perhaps using the magnetic letter tray – e.g.
'Make *wish*. Change one letter to make *dish*, then *dash*, *mash*, *mush*, *much*, *muck*, *luck*, *lock*, etc.'

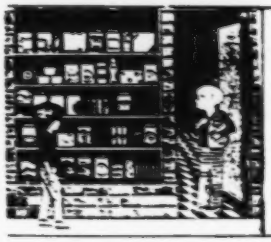
CO-OPERATIVE CLOZE IS MORE EFFECTIVE AS A TEACHING STRATEGY THAN INDIVIDUAL CLOZE, BECAUSE IT ALLOWS CHILDREN TO OFFER AND SUBSTANTIATE A VARIETY OF RESPONSES.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

The four servants of language, speaking, listening, reading and writing, work in concert within the DRTA strategy. Every teaching opportunity is exploited to link these modes, especially reading and writing. For example, a story can be used as a springboard to promote writing. Jointly constructed text scribed by the teacher serves to provide children with scaffolding and a model for individual writing attempts later.

Sub-strategy: JOINT CONSTRUCTION of TEXT

Ask, '*What might Jeremy say to Sam?*'
With the children's assistance, scribe responses.



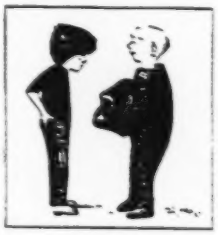
"*Look what I've got!*

I bet you want some of these too."

Sub-strategy: INDIVIDUAL WRITING

- Inventing dialogue:

'*Read the story until you reach this picture. Write down what you think Jeremy is saying to Sam.*'



That's I've got Something you haven't got Sir Jeremy So what! said Sam.

- Writing an ending for the story:

'*Read the story up to this picture and write an ending.*'

Jenny Sam down down and down come out of the water and Sam walked past by the river Sam, Sam Sam please help me. No!

- Writing an additional episode:
  e.g.

Mermen Looked up the street
Sam was playing with his car
Look what I've got! he said
I bet you wish you got one

- Describing a picture:

'*Write about all the strange things you can see in this picture.*'

The superman cat has masks. Thes girls on the life That cost being out of the Jens. The bird, three things a hot dog on the gate There's odjscats There's a ces crem There's

Rarely do children say, '*I don't know what to write about...*' when involved in this kind of writing based on literature.

SUBSEQUENT SESSIONS: RETURNING TO and GOING BEYOND the TEXT

Whether or not any further learning experiences are offered will depend on children's enthusiasm and desire to engage further with a particular book. Where possible, they should be offered a range of choice for responding to the text in meaningful ways.

Remember that the pleasure of reading should not be spoilt by *having to do* too many activities based on any one book.

Individualised reading practice

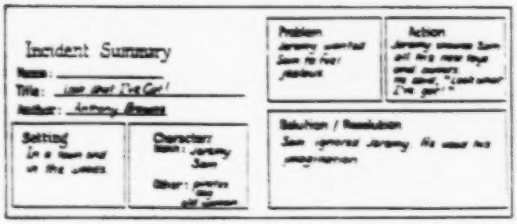
Where the first reading has been a shared one, children can be encouraged to read the text independently. If the text is matched to ability level, they may be expected to read some sections orally. Such readings should be conducted individually to avoid embarrassment and allow opportunity for the child to self-correct errors. (You can never self-correct in 'round-robin' reading... everyone else does it for you!) This is a time to use those vital prompting skills which will help the child to *read for meaning*, use the *integrated cueing system* and *develop independence*.

N.B. If the text is *too difficult* for the child, simply join in and complete the session *without frustration!*

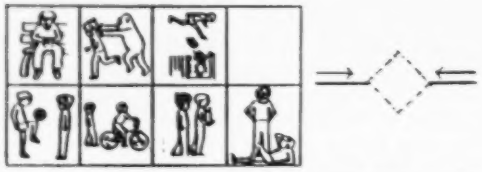
Story retelling
How well a child is able to retell the whole story gives an indication of comprehension. Retelling may be conducted orally or, occasionally, in written form.

Journal writing
The child records the title and author and writes a brief personal response to the text.

Incident summary
An incident summary allows us to focus directly on story structure. Of course this activity, like all others, must be demonstrated and jointly constructed several times before a child can be expected to complete it independently.



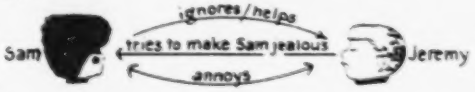
Picture/sentence matching
Cut out the pictures and match them with the appropriate text. Fold down the middle of the sheet, having cut along the dotted line. Squeeze the cut section from each side to form a diamond and continue squeezing to flatten it. The sequence can then be folded into a little book.



Sam passed a shop. Jeremy had a bag of sweets.	He ate them all. Jeremy sat down suddenly...	A gorilla leaped out at him.	*Look What I've Got!* Anthony Browne

Sentence reconstruction
Sentence reconstruction allows children to practise using individual words from the story in context. Write selected sentences from the story on different coloured strips of cardboard. Cut the sentences into words. The child is required to reconstruct sentences meaningfully (they need not necessarily be the same as in the text).

Sociogram



MORE READING

One of the best activities is to *read* – either by voluntarily re-reading (in this case) *Look What I've Got!*, or by reading other books by the same author, or other books on a similar theme (e.g. Pamela Allen, *I Wish I Had a Pirate Suit*).

Books by Anthony Browne (from easier to harder):

Bear Hunt
Changes
Willy and Hugh
Willy the Champ
Through the Magic Mirror
Gorilla
Willy the Wimp
Piggybook
Zoo
The Tunnel
Hansel and Gretel

IN RETROSPECT

Modified versions of the DRTA technique provide a useful strategy to focus on prediction and meaning. DRTA embraces many processing procedures within the range of possible sub-strategies and allows the child to develop knowledge of detail whilst operating at the level of the whole text.

Helpful references

Bennett, Jill 1985, *Learning to Read with Picture Books*, 3rd edn, Thimble Press, Stroud, Glos.
O'Sullivan, Colleen 1987, *The Challenge of Picture Books*, Methuen, Sydney.
Stauffer, Russell 1970, *The Language Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading*, Harper and Row, New York, pp. 132-76.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Random House Australia for permission to use material from Anthony Browne's *Look What I've Got!*

Lyn Young is a teacher who has worked for many years with older inexperienced readers in outer-western Sydney. She is often invited to share her practice with other teachers at inservice workshops. She demonstrates the strategies discussed in this PEN on *Making Connections*, a video with accompanying notes produced by the NSW Dept of School Education, Metropolitan West Region, and available from the Special Education Support Centre, Penrith South (047 21 4855).

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